

Rezension: Firoze Manji and Patrick Burnett: African voices on development and social justice: editorials from Pambazuka News 2004

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Rezensionen

Firoze Manji and **Patrick Burnett**: *African Voices on Development and Social Justice: Editorials from Pambazuka News 2004*, Dar es Salaam, 2005, Nkuki na Nyota Publishers (Distributed by African Books Collective, Ltd), xi + 275 S., ISBN 9987-417-35-3

African Voices is an experiment by editors of the must-read weekly, *Pambazuka News*, to publish in book form the previous year's editorials. *African Voices* is a collector's item. How else can one possibly describe this collection of 54 essays by 46 contributors, including academics and activists of note? Like its electronic cradle, the book is a cacophony, not only in terms of the multitudinous voices, but also in coverage and opinions.

'Cacophony' best describes this assortment of voices, tones and concerns. The diversity in content, which include denunciations, complaints, warnings, pleas and treatises, is a veritable racket. Additionally, the contributors are simply not talking to each other, which makes this a fascinating cacophonous racket. If there is something they agree on, it is that Africa has not been doing well and that the continent deserves—and can do—better. That is just about the only unifying thread in the book. Some semblance of agreement appears in the palpable scepticism, manifest pessimism and infectious cynicism shared by some contributors. The first chapter with seven articles focuses on Africa and the process of 'under-development'. This is an impressive overview of the debates, viewpoints and prescriptions rampant among many (pan-)Africanists. The majority of the authors present their cases competently, looking both inside and outside Africa for reasons why Africa is where it is. Contained therein is a good background for those who seek a quick explanatory overview of the state of the continent.

The eleven essays making up Chapter 2 take us back to those horrific 100 days in 1994 in Rwanda—a tragedy that the authors remind us still stands as evidence of collective negligence. In pieces by Caplan, Karangwa, Gasana there is active faultfinding tainted with timely warnings. Indicted and ridiculed here are governments, religion, some organisations and the African Diaspora. Carver usefully highlights the role of dangerously misguided media. Other contributors grapple with the question posed by many: *Why?* In an insightful two-part series, Caplan undertakes an analysis that should leave us scouring our consciences while being on the watch. Rakita looks at children and helpfully guides our gaze into their future. Zorbas and Erlichman look at two enduring legacies of the genocide, viz., reconciliation and the refugee challenge.

Regional integration is the theme of two essays in Chapter 3 concentrating on the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. Melber raises the problematic of regional integration by incisively dissecting NEPAD the 'mega-NGO', and a whole lot of 'divisive free trade treaties'. I like the way that he pre-

sents the messy reality from SACU to the WTO via the EU and ACP, not to mention AGOA. Nathan has no kind words for the SADC's security arrangements. His powerful evidence includes the illustrative cases of the DRC and Lesotho fiascos. He convincingly argues that the SADC's Organ on Politics, Defence and Security, has not, and might never evolve into an effective common security forum.

The Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa is handled in Chapter 4. The essays are passionate and logical. Here, the proponents are not just instinctively pleading for the ratification of the Protocol. They have good reasons. Wandia and Adjamagbo-Johnson helpfully take the reader into and around the Protocol, in the process explaining why it is needed. Forster scrutinizes the Protocol, highlighting its scope and provisions. Date-Bah's treatise is helpful in presenting the case for the 'consideration of women's concerns...in post-conflict contexts'. The eight papers have that quiet plea capable of stirring social justice enthusiasts to action.

The contentious issue about Nigeria's oil receives attention in three papers in Chapter 5, with a fourth one helpfully taking a brief foray into sustainability and Africa's natural resources management. Concannon provides a welcome glimpse into oil spills and the sordid politics and dishonourable technicalities surrounding them. His overview of stakeholder responses and explanations is truly enlightening. Bisina takes on 'corporate recklessness' in the Niger Delta.

Wamba, Balemba, Katshung and Higate grapple with the volatile Democratic Republic of Congo in the sixth chapter. In a fascinating piece, Wamba dissects the 'three phases of globalisation' and argues that they have something to do with the current crises in the DRC. Balemba digs into history to explain how war and impunity in the DRC is 'sowing seeds for catastrophe'. Another historical take appears in the interview with Katshung. Again, impunity seems to be the problem. In one of the longest papers in the volume Higate examines gender and villainous peacekeepers in the DRC and Sierra Leone.

African Voices would not be complete without some potshots at the Bretton Woods duo. This dutifully appears in Chapter 7. The chapter kicks up the tirade by wishing the World Bank and International Monetary Fund an unhappy 60th anniversary. Bond, the inimitable arch-critic of the unrelenting purveyors of neo-liberal economic formulae, castigates optimists who naively imagined that a change of personalities at the helm of the World Bank in 1995 would translate into substantive shifts. For those like me who thought the most exciting war on the privatisation of municipal services was being waged in South African townships, Amenga-Etego provides a lively case from Ghana. Guided by useful questions, Amenga-Etego, explicates the damage wrought by privatisation on the lives of Ghanaians. Predictably, the Bretton Woods twins are in for some tongue-lashing. In a treatise reminiscent of Bond's incessant censure of the Washington Consensus, Mutasa is at pains to explain why global apartheid continues to haunt global democracy. He is supported by Dembele, whose assessment of the record of the twins in Africa convinces him that it is nothing short of disastrous. Not impressed with the trivialisation of the Extractive Industries Review (EIR), Darimani accuses industry, governments and the World Bank of choosing profits over people.

Ndika's graphic presentation of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline, itself financed by the World Bank, raises the credibility level of Darimani's accusation.

Chapter 8 promises to discuss African refugees. After two articles, the steam apparently runs out and there is a shift to AIDS, poverty and human rights. Harrell-Bond and Kagan understandably wonder why refugees' rights are violated in many countries despite the existence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN's established record of involvement with refugees. This short treatise is packed with useful detail. Reflecting on World Refugee Day, Milner complains that despite 30 years of the OAU's Refugee Convention, there is little to celebrate. The chapter then veers off into another important Day with apparently nothing to celebrate about: World AIDS Day. Marais notices some troubling trends. This is not a baseless concern. The chapter then takes yet another turn. Sané directs us to poverty and human rights. He argues that poverty violates all the 'five families of human rights'.

What would *African Voices* be without coverage of post-2000 Zimbabwe? Ndlovu leads the five papers in Chapter 9 with a sober reappraisal of Zimbabwe's troubled years. Ndlovu's is an essay that offers deeper insights into several dimensions of the 'mounting catastrophe'. Win tries to awaken the South African Foreign Affairs Minister to the situation of women in Zimbabwe. She takes the much-criticised minister on a short harrowing journey into the lives of women in crisis-ridden Zimbabwe. The momentum continues with Kibble — in one of the most complete articles in the volume — accusing the government of trying to make people 'give up hoping'. Melber returns, this time analysing media repression in Zimbabwe. Much of the article rightly dwells on the architect of that repression. Raftopoulos weighs in with helpful insights into the revived nationalism, as he meticulously examines nation, race and history in Zimbabwean politics.

The closing chapter tackles the contentious question of 'naming the Darfur genocide'. Dadrian looks into the role of the gun-totting Sudanese government. For anyone wishing to quickly become a self-proclaimed 'expert' on Darfur, this is a good starting point. Dadrian returns in the next essay where she pulls no punches in 'calling genocide by its rightful name'. Mamdani joins the quest for a name for the crisis. His well-defended position is that what we are witnessing in Darfur is a 'genocide that could happen and must be prevented'. Prah refutes Muslim complicity in the Darfur crisis. The article contains valuable information explaining the relative silence of the Arab League.

Chapter 11 contains an instructive sample of readers' letters reacting to some editorials in the volume. It is a lively debate, with the capacity to see the undecided vacillating between sides.

So, what more can one say about *African Voices*? Subscribers to *Pambazuka News* may feel that they have read the editorials, maybe saved them, or even printed some and filed them. I am happy the book has been published. As stated, it's a collector's item, if only for its originality.

The cacophony in this volume is not stage-managed. It reflects diversity as well as honesty and candour, rare in some—if not most—'pan-African' publications. It is the assortment of viewpoints, explanatory frameworks, mood, prescrip-

tion and tone that makes this collection a great read. Some contributors are visibly angry—happily most are not irrational. Others, while obviously unhappy with the situation in and the attitude of some forces towards Africa, proceed stoically with their analyses. Olukoshi, Raftopoulos, Mamdani and Melber represent the latter group, while Ntuli and Tayob ably represent the former.

The book is a refreshing departure from the mandatory vituperation in the tirades, rants, diatribes, philippics and jeremiads characteristic of some 'African voices'. Reading through even the angriest essay in the volume, one cannot fail to discern that there is a point to the outbursts, denunciations and finger-pointing. One gets the reassuring sense that the contributors are not playing to the gallery, and that they are genuinely worried or puzzled and believe in their projects. This book is a mine of information. One-sided and manifestly biased sometimes, but good information nevertheless.

The usefulness of the compendium is enhanced by the brevity of the articles, which are on average less than five pages per article. This pithiness creates a welcome starting point for those who wish to get a quick, albeit situated, overview of the 'hot' issues in Africa.

However, the book's strength could also be its weakness. Concision inevitably demands sacrifices. There are not a few in this publication. Save for a handful of articles, there is virtually no reference to sources, cited or implied, which might help those who wish to delve more into specific issues. For a publication of this nature, references are necessary. Some of the contributors repeat ideas from other quarters but are deafeningly silent as to the origins of those ideas. Although most contributors do not openly peddle such ideas as their own, their silence as to sources is disturbing. The reader has a right to be redirected to originators of such ideas, be they accusations, prescriptions, complaints or statistics. Because of the clarity and poignancy of the book, there is a real chance that it is going to be widely used. Consequently, there is a real chance of some innocent reader wrongly attributing certain thoughts to contributors in this volume.

As a pointer the book is great. Needless to say, pointers should helpfully direct readers to some useful place. This 'pointing' needs not be overly academic. Melber in his first essay and Raftopoulos have done a good job in directing us to some place where we can get more details, should we happen to develop a thirst that needs some quenching. As demonstrated by the two, this can be done without compromising the rawness that makes this collection a pleasure to read and a treasure to possess.

So, should the book initiative become an annual publication? *By all means*. I still maintain that this is a collector's item. At about \$40, it is pricy, but navigating through it, one gets the lasting satisfaction that it is a worthy investment. True, many of us have the 54 electronic versions from 2004, but one fact that this somewhat well packaged inaugural collection proves is that the printed page remains hard to beat.

(Amin Y Kamete)